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ABSTRACT

The position statement identifies seven problem areas in respect to the mainstreaming movement and gives the position of the National Association of Retarded Citizens on each. The positions focus on the following issues: (1) a definition of mainstreaming, (2) the need to implement mainstreaming in carefully planned stages, (3) the view that integration is not the goal itself but rather is a means of facilitating skills needed by mentally retarded persons, (4) the need to modify traditional patterns of educational service delivery in the direction of individualized programming for all students, (5) the need to train future teachers to teach students with a wide range of functional abilities and cultures, (6) the need for a public information campaign to promote positive attitudes toward the retarded, and (7) the need for a national evaluation effort to assess the efficacy of mainstreaming within the public schools. (DB)

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MAINSTREAMING MENTALLY RETARDED STUDENTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

POSITION STATEMENTS BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CITIZENS

APRIL 1978

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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MAINSTREAMING MENTALLY RETARDED STUDENTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

POSITION STATEMENTS BY THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CITIZENS
APRIL 1978

The number of mentally retarded students enrolled in public school programs has increased markedly over the past several decades. Despite this growth in enrollments, considerable controversy still surrounds the efficacy and implementation of various educational placement alternatives. During the 1940s the controversy centered primarily upon the opposing views that mentally retarded persons either should be completely segregated from their non-retarded peers or educated in special classes located within the public school system (Blackman & Goldberg, 1965). Those favoring segregation believed that such an approach would ensure the availability of specialized services and protect retarded persons from unfair competition. Opponents of segregation argued that close proximity to non-retarded persons in the education process would help retarded pupils both academically and socially.

The need for greater flexibility in the organization of education services became increasingly apparent as special education programs expanded dramatically in the 1960s (Reynolds, 1962; Deno, 1970), and the special education community was subjected to a new round of criticism concerning the adequacy of placement procedures and the proliferation of self-contained classrooms (Dunn, 1968). The feeling was that many persons began to suspect that special classes were largely becoming a dumping ground for low socio-economic and ethnic minority children. Today the movement is clearly away from self-contained classes as the primary strategy in special education, and the majority of mentally retarded persons are being considered for enrollment in regular classrooms. The basic premise underlying this movement, referred to as "mainstreaming," is that the average teacher can learn to educate mentally retarded children in the normal classroom with the support and consultative services of special education personnel (Birch, 1974).

The recent advocacy of mainstreaming appears to have its basis in the wide acceptance of the principle of normalization (Nirje, 1969), as well as in reaction to the alleged negative effects

of labeling and the violation of civil rights due to questionable special education placement practices (Dunn, 1968; Mercer, 1973). Birch (1974) has also observed that movement toward the placement of mentally retarded students in regular education classes may be related to civil actions against segregation in general, parental bias against special class placement for their children and the increased transportability of special instructional programs which make mainstreaming a viable program option. Moreover, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) mandates that handicapped children, including mentally retarded children, be educated with the non-handicapped to the maximum feasible extent, leaving the burden of proof on the local school to argue for a special class for any individual in its jurisdiction (Martin, 1976).

The new emphasis on mainstreaming potentially means that the vast majority of mentally retarded students will be spending a considerable portion of each day in classes with their non-retarded peers, leaving only as needed for special instruction. NARC certainly supports this movement toward the least restrictive environment for mentally retarded students, yet acknowledges the numerous pragmatic difficulties which may interfere with the success of mainstreaming programs. Hastily and poorly conceived mainstreaming efforts will likely generate massive resistances on the part of parents, as well as teachers and other professionals, when mentally retarded students begin to fail because of such factors as inadequately trained teachers or limited instructional resources. Thus, NARC strongly urges that all mainstreaming efforts be implemented on the basis of systematic educational planning, performance monitoring and continuous evaluation of the educational efficacy of mainstreaming for individual mentally retarded students.

The following statements by NARC address the above areas of concern and are intended to help clarify the Association's stance with regard to the philosophy and implementation of the mainstreaming concept.

PROBLEM 1

Mainstreaming has been defined in many different ways, and sometimes the philosophy of mainstreaming is confused with techniques used to implement the principle. Some educators say that mainstreaming simply means the elimination of categorical labels and the mass integration of mentally retarded students into school classes with their non-retarded peers. Others believe that it means the physical placement of self-contained special classes in the same school building with non-retarded students. For others, mainstreaming refers to the assignment of retarded students to a regular class teacher who, in turn, receives diagnostic, curricular and instructional help from a resource or itinerant teacher. Still another view is that mainstreaming represents an educational model which encompasses a continuum of education programs ranging from self-contained classes to regular class placement for those students who require little or no special assistance.

POSITION

NARC considers mainstreaming to be **a philosophy or principle of educational service delivery which is implemented by providing a variety of classroom and instructional alternatives that are appropriate to the individual educational plan for each student and allows maximal temporal, social and instructional interaction among mentally retarded and non-retarded students in the normal course of the school day.** To accomplish this, every school system should have a stated policy and guidelines for implementing the mainstreaming principle, and both regular and special teachers should be involved in the planning and carry-through of the policy. Careful consideration also should be given to establishing a flexible system which will allow appropriate transition and movement within the system as dictated by the individual learning needs of each child.

PROBLEM 2

Although mainstreaming is achieving widespread adoption in principle, there is growing concern that adequate consideration is not being given to the programmatic details of implementation. This is particularly evident in the wholesale return of special education students to regular classes without support services or carefully planned educational modification of existing programs. Mandating legislation and court decisions favoring the use of mainstreaming may, in fact, be pressuring the public schools to integrate masses of retarded individuals before the students and teachers are prepared for such a major shift in educational service delivery.

POSITION

Mainstreaming must be implemented in carefully planned stages, including the development of school policy covering (1) procedural guidelines and clear delineation of responsibilities; (2) inservice education for both regular and special class teachers; (3) careful orientation of students to avoid unnecessary sensitization to individual differences; and (4) involvement of parents in formulating education objectives, student evaluation and development of individual educational plans, and the employment of special support personnel.

PROBLEM 3

Sometimes mainstreaming is viewed as a school-wide placement policy which does not take into consideration the vast differences found among persons classified as mentally retarded, and carry-through of the principle may be restricted to a single implementation strategy such as a highly specialized resource teacher program. This view seriously limits the number of mentally retarded students who can be served appropriately within the public schools.

POSITION

As a general rule, all mentally retarded students should be integrated into the mainstream of public education to the maximum extent possible in accordance with the least restrictive placement provisions specified in Public Law 94-142. However, **integration per se should not be considered an educational goal. Rather, it should be viewed as a viable means of facilitating the acquisition of social, academic and life skills needed by mentally retarded persons to live in a world populated by handicapped as well as non-handicapped persons.** As stated previously, the specific type of educational placement for a given child must be based on an individual educational plan. Thus, a variety of placement options will be necessary, including resource teaching programs in association with regular class placement, special classes with integration in one or more academic subjects and self-contained programs within the public school building for some children with highly specific and/or unusual learning needs, such as the profoundly retarded and multiply handicapped student. In all cases, placement in any component of the service continuum should be based on continuing evaluation of student progress, and feedback from such evaluation should be used to modify both student placement and the educational delivery system.

PROBLEM 4

Mainstreaming will produce major changes in educational settings and have a pronounced impact upon teacher training activities, curricular objectives and classroom organization for all students in the pub-

lic schools. Traditionally, public school education has been organized to serve children according to classes or groups, and the concept of individualized instruction, which has its theoretical roots in general education, is just beginning to be seriously applied and practiced in selected public school settings.

POSITION

Mainstreaming must be viewed as affecting all students and teachers in the public schools, and **traditional patterns of educational service delivery must be modified in the direction of individualized programming for all students.** For example, leaving the classroom for special instruction would not be limited to only one group of students, thus helping to minimize the stigmatization that may be associated with resource teacher programs. Individualization is a concept that must take on many and varied forms and must not be restricted to written individualized educational programs. Simply stated, every individual must be educationally treated as an individual. Individualization should help to alleviate the problem of assigning curricular objectives primarily for average ability students and help provide a **wide range of educational experiences which will benefit all students**, regardless of their learning needs.

PROBLEM 5

Various models and procedures exist for implementing the mainstreaming principle, yet information related to mainstreaming options are not presently available to all public school personnel. Moreover, teacher training programs typically have been designed to prepare teachers to work only with certain age and ability groups. For example, a certified elementary school teacher is neither prepared nor experienced to teach children who deviate significantly from average. These teachers usually are taught also that children with unusual learning needs are not their responsibility. Although professional specialties have been created within teacher training programs to deal with exceptional children, graduates from these programs usually are not taught to coordinate their activities or services with those of the regular classroom teacher.

POSITION

Future classroom teachers must be prepared to develop educational programs for students with a wide rather than a restricted range of functional abilities and to interact positively with a broad spectrum of cultural diversity. Their daily efforts must be supported by special teachers who have been trained to provide the necessary diagnostic, prescriptive and instructional assistance to deal with the unusual learning needs of exceptional students. Teacher training institutions should

also help provide inservice education programs for their former graduates who are being called upon to function within mainstreaming programs.

PROBLEM 6

Mainstreaming has achieved the status of a national movement, and the word is an often heard catchphrase. Yet, mainstreaming is little understood by the general public as well as by many educators who are now being called upon to support the principle.

POSITION

A national public information campaign is needed to educate our citizens concerning the mainstreaming movement and its implications, including regular and special educators themselves. Such a **public information campaign should focus upon the promotion of positive attitudes concerning the capabilities of mentally retarded persons and the need for creating an educational environment wherein all students may learn that vast differences among persons are a real part of the human experience.** Thus, it is no longer acceptable for children to be separated from one another on the basis of categorical differences, or for education solely to be structured to conform with traditional ability or age groupings. The ultimate success of mainstreaming will depend in large measure upon public acceptance of the fact that individualized education planning and instruction are highly desirable for all students, handicapped and non-handicapped alike.

PROBLEM 7

Early mainstreaming efforts were begun without systematic planning for evaluation and without a national evaluation component. Consequently, no unequivocal data exist to support these movements.

POSITION

NARC supports the establishment of a national evaluation effort to assess the efficacy of mainstreaming within the public schools. It is recommended that a systems approach be utilized involving evaluation, feedback, revision and monitoring. Suggested areas for evaluation emphasis might include: 1) the acceptance or rejection of mentally retarded and other handicapped students by their peers in regular education classes; 2) the efficacy of regular class placement for mentally retarded students with differing degrees of handicaps, ages and backgrounds; 3) the cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit associated with mainstreaming; and 4) the relationship of mainstreaming to the short-term and long-term educational and life skills performance of mentally retarded persons.

The NARC position statements, **Mainstreaming Mentally Retarded Students in the Public Schools**, were prepared by the NARC Education Committee with assistance from headquarters staff and other resource people.

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